

# Information on **Scabies** (Itch Mites)



## What is scabies?

Scabies is a parasitic disease caused by a mite (*Sarcoptes scabiei*) which penetrates the top layer of a person's skin. The female mite burrows under the surface of the skin and lays her eggs which causes intense itching. The itching is usually most severe at night. Scabies infection can also be accompanied by a rash and/or skin eruptions in the areas of the infestation.

## How can I tell if I have scabies?

The mite burrows are often visible as white or grey, thread-like tunnels under the skin. The most common areas burrows are found in are:

- **men** between the webs of the fingers, the inside of the wrists, elbows and arm pits, beltline, thighs, ankles and genitals;
- **women** the nipples, abdomen and lower portion of the buttocks;
- **infants** the scalp, neck, palms and soles of the feet.

## Is scabies a serious health problem?

In healthy individuals there are very few complications from scabies. ***The most common problem is secondary bacterial infections caused by scratching.*** Scabies infestation can be more severe in immuno-compromised persons, the developmentally disabled and the elderly.

## How is scabies transmitted?

The scabies mite is transmitted by skin to skin contact or during sexual contact. The mite can be transferred on underwear or bed clothes which have been used ***immediately beforehand*** by an infested person. The mite can burrow beneath the skin in less than 3 minutes.

## How long before symptoms appear?

In people who have never had scabies before, itching usually starts from 2 to 6 weeks after being infested. Persons who have had scabies previously and are ***re-infested*** will develop symptoms in 1 to 4 days.

## How is scabies treated? ***See your doctor.***

- Scabies can be treated by applying an appropriate scabicide cream or lotion. The most effective treatments are prescription medications. The most common treatment for children is a lotion containing 5% permethrin. Adults may use the permethrin treatment or alternatively a 1% lindane lotion. ***Lindane is not recommended for pregnant women or very young children.*** Be sure to carefully follow the directions provided by your physician. Itching may last for up to 2 weeks after successful treatment. Secondary infections caused by scratching should be treated with antibiotics.
- ***Household, sexual, and close contacts of a person with scabies should be treated at the same time.***
- Clothes or bedding used up to 3 days before treatment should be laundered in hot, soapy water and dried in the hot cycle of the dryer.

## How can scabies infestation be prevented?

- Avoid skin to skin or sexual contact with an infested person.

## What about school or child care?

Children with scabies should be excluded from school or child care until appropriately treated.

*If you have questions, please call your doctor or local health department.*

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